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## Ladbrokes embraces the web



The site will focus on football betting at first

Ladbrokes, the UK's biggest betting business, is going online.

It plans to invest £100m in internet-related gaming sites in the UK. It will launch two new websites, and betting will be also be available through interactive television.

Ladbrokes is teaming up with BSkyB which is rolling out an interactive television service called Open.

It has also agreed deals with cable operators Telewest and Cable and Wireless.

Finally, the company is working with Ericsson to develop online gambling via mobile phones. A prototype will be available in the next few months.

Of the two websites, one will be based in the UK and initially concentrate on football.

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The other, which will be launched in a few weeks, will be multilingual and offshore.

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## **Huge potential market**

Ladbrokes estimates that the online gaming market is worth £500bn worldwide.

Telewest hopes to have 500,000 digital subscribers by the end of 2000, while BSkyB is aiming for 2m digital subscribers who would have access to its interactive television service.

"The series of UK partnerships we are announcing today will enable Ladbrokes, the world's leading betting group, to reach a far wider and more affluent audience," said Ladbrokes chief executive Peter George.

The company hopes to attract the kind of numbers of people who gamble each week on the National Lottery - some 60% of the population - to its websites, as opposed to the 3% who use betting shops.

## **Ladbrokes under pressure**

Ladbrokes is part of the Hilton Group, which includes hotels, restaurants as well as the UK's biggest chain of betting shops.

It has come under pressure in the last year from other betting companies, who are moving to set up online or telephone betting offshore to avoid UK betting tax.

Rivals Coral and William Hill have already announced plans for offshore services.

Ladbrokes has also been lobbying the government to reduce or eliminate the betting tax, which it believes is encouraging offshore gambling and weakening its position in the UK.

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